



AOK 2018 Annual Report

“The kindness you teach at the dinner table has taught me to have hope in the world”

—Bella Varela, AOK artist

Introduction. AOK has wrapped up our second full year of operations, and what a year it was. In 2018 we provided support for 16 kids in college, took 20 kids to Cape Cod for summer vacation, had specially-chosen presents under the tree and stockings hung on the hearth for 22 kids during the holiday season, celebrated 30 birthdays and hosted 24 members of the AOK community almost every week at Thursday Night Dinner.

At the AOK Art Space we provided residencies for 4 young artists, solo gallery shows for 4 artists and group shows for 17 artists and hosted hundreds of young artists and art supporters at events.

We met the health care and mental health care needs of 11 kids, helped meet general day-to-day needs for close to 30 kids and provided love, support, experiences, connections and belief to every single one of our kids.

Plus, oh yeah, David donated a kidney to Madeline...

We also kicked off mentor and fellowship plans for ensuring all our kids have the support they need, and laid the ground work for an exciting new Artist Residency Center program on Cape Cod.

And in order to do all of this, we have continued to build an incredibly diverse community that not only provides support for our kids, but also nourishment to all who participate, regardless of age or background. AOK is not just a youth-service organization, it is a robust, vibrant, diverse community that benefits everyone, not just the kids.

We couldn't have done any of this without the ongoing support of a growing family of donors. The faith you have placed in us, and the belief in and love for our kids you demonstrate in so many ways means more to us than we can possibly say. We are grateful for your support, and we look forward to continuing to work together to ensure that all our kids have the opportunities and the resources they need—and deserve—to realize their dreams and fulfill their true potential.

Keep reading to learn more details about the successes and challenges of 2018 and our plans for 2019 and beyond.

Impact.

“It’s pretty simple: I’m studying drama in Wales and I would not be here if it weren’t for AOK.”

—Tatiana Chavez, AOK Artist

Through the community we are building, AOK provides a dense network of support to our young artists. From general day-to-day needs, to medical care to tuition help and housing assistance, to arts supplies to special trips, experiences and connections, we provide what our kids need to see what’s best in themselves, to recognize and value their potential, to surround themselves with people who share a positive vision for them and equip them with the knowledge, connections, opportunities and self-confidence they need to make their dreams come true. We continued to make a big difference in the lives of our young artists in our second full year. Here’s the nitty gritty:

- **Artist Support.** Thanks to our partnership with Independent Sector, the AOK Art Space in downtown Washington, D.C. has not only provided much-needed space and resources for young artists, but a gathering and community-building space in which young artists can interact in a supportive environment. Here are some of the details:
 - 4 visual artists presented solo shows in the Lobby Gallery. Opening receptions for all of these shows were festive celebrations of the artist and the DC-area community of young artists. All presenting artists sold works displayed in their shows. Hundreds of people a day pass in front of or through the lobby, which was a level of public exposure none of the artists had experienced before.
 - AOK presented 2 group shows in the 7th Floor Gallery, in which 17 artists showed work.
 - Our young artists produced 4 group performances in the 9th Floor space, with artists performing a range of styles and genres, from spoken word to jazz to R&B to hip hop.
 - 4 community-building and discussion events attended by dozens of young DC-area artists explored themes such as gentrification, feminism and mental health
 - We sponsored a 10-week class on the basics of photography, taught by one of our young artists, which was well-attended and free to participants. This was a pilot for a series of free classes we will offer in 2019.
 - Hundreds of young artists and arts supporters attended receptions, performances, discussions and classes at the AOK Art Space in 2018.
 - AOK hosted 4 resident artists in 2018, providing them with space to make and show their work, art supplies, mentorship and community.
 - 3 AOK artists formed our Artist Committee, which provided an important leadership development opportunity for them. They were responsible for

programming, publicizing and producing AOK Art Space events and activities and maintaining a positive relationship with all partners.

- **Education and Life Support.**

- AOK is committed to providing our young students with all the resources they need to succeed in school without debilitating student debt.
 - In 2018 we provided assistance of various kinds to 16 kids in college, at the community college, four-year college and even graduate school levels.
 - We provided allowance to all of our students in addition to making sure they had the computers, books, school supplies and dorm supplies they need.
 - We provided housing assistance for 2 of our students
 - We provided tuition assistance to 10 of our students
 - We helped find tutors for students who needed extra help, and provided mentoring to all of our students, to help them stay focused and make smart choices.
 - One of our kids graduated in May, 2018, with a degree in public health.
- Many of our kids lack the resources required for the basic necessities of life. We ensure all our kids have adequate access to the material things they need to negotiate every-day life, not to mention things you just can't put a price tag on, including love, joy, trust, advice, high expectations, laughter and community. In 2018 we provided:
 - Hundreds of meals throughout the year
 - Housing for 8 kids
 - Therapists for 11 of our kids
 - Health care needs and expenses for 7 kids
 - Phones and phone service for 9 kids
 - Computers for 5 young people
 - Art supplies for 6 of our young artists
 - And don't forget that kidney...

- **Work/Internships.** We assisted a number of our kids successfully apply for jobs and internships at a number of organizations in 2018, including:

- AOK—three of our kids have internships to produce and post content on our social media and website
- Carne y Arena Art Exhibit, sponsored by Emerson Collective—4 of our kids worked there full time throughout the exhibit
- Arts Across America, a program of the Kennedy Center
- Turnaround Arts, a program of the Kennedy Center
- Anacostia Art Center
- Eden Development, LLC, owner of Union Market in DC
- DC Fire Academy
- One of our artists has received a number of commissions to create murals throughout the DC area

- One of our photographers has been invited to document the tours of up and coming young rappers
- **Thursday Night Dinner and Special Experiences.**
 - Our signature program is Thursday Night Dinner (TND), where we host AOK kids and the adults who support them at a weekly dinner. Every week 18-30 people gather around the table to share a home-cooked meal. This is where AOK family members of all ages feel at home, safe, seen, respected and loved.
 - *In 2018 we served more than 1000 meals at Thursday Night Dinner!!*
 - We are always on the lookout for special experiences to enrich the lives of our young people and to make them feel special. Here's a sample of what we provided in 2018:
 - We spent a fantastic week on Cape Cod with 20 of our kids in July. The trip was a huge success—the kids had an amazing time, and by all accounts the trip was even better than our inaugural trip in 2017. If you haven't seen it already, check out Nabil's fabulous [video](#) of the week.
 - 22 kids had specially chosen gifts under the tree on Christmas morning, thanks to our incredibly generous Holiday Angels. It was a joy to see how happy the kids were, unpacking their stockings, opening their gifts, sharing in the delicious food and spending quality time together. We are so grateful to our Holiday Angels for making this possible.
 - We celebrated 30 birthdays with special dinners, presents and shout outs at Thursday Night Dinner
 - We brought kids to a number of special events, including Yo Yo Ma's unforgettable performance at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC, a Nationals baseball game, as well as several concerts and plays at the Kennedy Center and at other DC venues.
 - Many of our kids were given prominent roles at AOK's two most important fundraising events in 2018. They all showed spectacular grace and poise as they represented AOK and we are super proud of them.
- **Mentoring/Coaching.** AOK provides a dense network of support from caring peers and adults for all of our kids. Once a kid joins the AOK family, we pair them with a mentor/coach. This primary relationship allows our young artists to experience the growth of a trusting relationship, and allows us to learn more about them so we can best help them move toward their dreams. As we learn more about them—their challenges, obstacles, goals and dreams—we connect them with people who can help them with particular areas of need, provide access to an array of positive experiences and opportunities and who become part of the team of caring adults committed to the success of all our young people.
 - Number of involved adults: Over 50 and growing, providing all kinds of mentoring and coaching support
 - Number of organizational partners: 12 and growing (Independent Sector, Invisible Hand Foundation, Union Market, Capitol Hill Arts Center, Bowen

McCauley Dance, Sixth and I, Target, Chipotle, Verizon, Dolphin Fleet Whale Watch, Ptown Bikes and Mac's Shack)

Financials.

"The AOK dinner table is a representation of how art and community can mend us."

—Maureen Smith, AOK Artist

Revenue. We raised just over \$466,000 in 2018, an increase of almost one-third over 2017 (we raised \$348,000 in 2017).

- 2018 Donor Break-down:
 - \$1-\$49: 101
 - \$50-\$99: 71
 - \$100-\$249: 125
 - \$250-\$999: 79
 - \$1000-\$4,999: 40
 - \$5,000-\$50,000: 23

Expenses. In 2018 we spent \$420,056, an increase of about 10% over 2017 (we spent 382,000 in 2017).

- 2018 Spending Break-down:
 - Programming: 65% (\$275,978)
 - Administration: 10% (\$41,010)
 - Fundraising: 25% (\$103,068)
- A 2019 objective is to bring the combined cost of admin and fundraising below 30% of spending.
- We finished 2018 with roughly four months of operating reserves in the bank. Our objective for 2019 is to increase that reserve to and maintain it at six months of operating reserves in the bank.

Communications.

- **Press.** AOK generated a couple of significant stories in 2018:
 - A [photo spread](#) in Washington Life in May showed off our Annual Awards Dinner
 - A long [story](#) in the Washington Post described Madeline's struggle with kidney disease and David's decision to donate a kidney to her.
 - David Brooks will be releasing a new book in April, 2019, in which AOK plays a prominent role. We will work to leverage his book release and book tour for media opportunities
 - We will also refresh our website in the first half of 2019

Challenges. While AOK has achieved a great deal in our first two years, it has not been all smooth sailing. Our intensely hands-on approach to supporting our kids is very demanding, and that combined with the limits in capacity inherent to most new organizations and the specific,

especially intense needs of specific kids have presented challenges to our small staff, board and adult mentors and supporters.

- **Go broad or go deep.** We have grappled with the strategic and day-to-day choice of going deep with a limited number of kids, or going broad by attracting as many kids as possible and replicating Thursday Night Dinner in other locations. In 2018 we decided to go deep. We realize that because our approach is so intensively hands-on, we are most successful when we are working with a relatively small group of kids at any given time. This reflection spurred our decision to create our Fellowship Program, motivated our commitment to recruiting more mentors and helped shape our idea for an Artist Residency Program in Cape Cod (see below for descriptions of the Fellowship and Wellfleet Residency programs).
- **Mentors.** One of the key ways we can compensate for our small staff is by building a robust roster of volunteer mentors and coaches. We have successfully created a beginning version of a mentor program, where many of our kids are connected with 1-on-1 mentors who both ensure we have the information we need to provide adequate support for our kids and provide our kids with an important relationship with a trusted adult, which in itself is highly valuable to the social emotional growth of our kids.

Our objective in 2019 is to ensure that all of our kids have solid relationships with mentors they like and trust, and that all our mentors have the confidence and tools they need to be successful in their partnership with their mentees.

- **Cash Flow.** AOK has been very successful, considering we are just beginning our third year of operations, in developing and growing a strong base of individual donors, with increasing numbers of donors giving over \$5,000. We've also been successful in getting donors to renew their support, particularly at the higher end of our donor pyramid. That said, we are still a new organization, and as such have had to cope with periodic cash flow pinches. Fortunately, our generous donors have ensured our ability to weather them.

One of our chief fundraising objectives in 2019 is to start winning the support of institutional givers. We are only now able to start seriously seeking foundation support since most of them want to see a couple of years of 990s before considering support. (This is not the case for many family foundations, and AOK receives support from many of these.) Multi-year foundation support will enable us to make our revenue more consistent throughout the year and help us better weather the periodic cash flow pinches that few young organizations are immune from. It will also enable us to budget further into the future and make programmatic and strategic decisions and plans with greater confidence.

We finished 2018 with close to four months of operating reserves in the bank, which is a significant guard against cash flow pinches. We aspire, in 2019, to creating and maintaining a six-month reserve. This will create an even more solid barrier against cash flow ebbs and flows.

- **Capacity.** Inevitably linked to the uneven cash flow endemic to young organizations is a limited capacity to hire staff and fully develop programmatic priorities. We have compensated for this by developing a deep bench of volunteers who help us provide the intensive scaffolding of support our kids need to move forward toward their dreams. The AOK community has functioned like a big family and we each step forward as needed to help each other. That said, managing a system of volunteers is itself a time consuming task.

As our fundraising becomes more established and cash flow evens out, our objective in 2019 is to hire at least one full-timer staffer to help us manage all the administrative and programmatic elements of our work more effectively.

- **Tuition.** Also connected at root to our young fundraising infrastructure is our ability to meet the tuition needs of our students. In order to keep our commitments to our young students, many of whom we helped get into college, we've had to sign or co-sign loans to cover the tuition of four of our students. This is not an ideal situation. Fortunately, we are only making payments on the loans of two of the students; the rest won't kick in till after the other two graduate.

Nonetheless, it is our objective in 2019 to raise funds specifically to retire these student loans so we can enter 2020 without any debt obligations.

2019. As you can see, 2018 was an amazing year for AOK. In 2019 we have ambitious plans:

- **AOK Artist Residency Center.** We are very excited to share that in 2019 we will start offering artist residencies for AOK artists in Wellfleet, MA that will complement our ongoing DC-based programming.

One of the most powerful examples of the memorable experiences we offer our kids is our annual trip to Cape Cod. This year we took 20 kids to the Cape, and they all were blown away by the experience of spending a week in such a beautiful place, far away from the stress and noise of the city, feeling safe and cared for and where they could really sink into conversations and connections with each other. It was a life-changing

experience for all of them. Check out the fantastic short [video](#) one of our kids made about our 2018 trip.

After returning from the Cape last summer, we began to think about the value of combining the Cape Cod experience with artist support we already provide at our Art Space downtown DC and the mentoring support we provide to all our kids. We realized that an Artist Residency Program would be an exciting way to do this and the logical next step in AOK's journey toward our vision of a world in which creative young people from challenging backgrounds have the resources they need to be successful and happy.

Through AOK's envisioned Wellfleet Residency, we will offer DC-area young artists a powerful experience in a beautiful place that will provide them with the peace and support needed to deeply focus on making art, increase their skills, connect with other artists and move toward larger creative and life goals.

AOK artists will be selected for 2-week to 2-month residencies throughout the year, during which they will be provided with housing and meals, along with space to create and show work. We will also provide resources and opportunities that will increase their artistic skill, make them better managers of their careers and connect them with other artists and with the local community.

We have already found a property we love: a historic, 2-acre piece of land a half-mile from the center of Wellfleet that has two structures on it that can house 10-12 people. We are working with the current owners on a plan and timeline for purchasing the property. Our plan is to launch a capital campaign in May, 2019 to raise \$1.5 million that will allow us to buy the property by the end of 2019 and renovate it and start hosting residencies there in the summer of 2020

To launch this program, Kathy and David will be moving to Wellfleet in May, 2019. They will host a series of pilot 'pop-up' residencies in the summer of 2019. Starting in June, they will host 4-6 artists in their home, where they will be provided work space and other resources in what will be the inaugural AOK artist residencies. This will allow us to work out the kinks, prove the model to funders and other stakeholders and start building relationships and partnerships with artists, mentors and arts organizations on the Outer Cape. These initial residencies will also serve as a kick off to the above-mentioned capital campaign to raise the funds to purchase and renovate the property in Wellfleet.

We are very excited about this new stage of growth for AOK, and about the exceptional and unique opportunities it will provide young DC artists to sink into their art, learn the skills—both artistic and otherwise—they need to be successful participants in the

creative economy and create community in a beautiful, safe environment. Stay tuned for more details.

- **Current Programming.** The Wellfleet Residency emerges out of and will complement our current DC-based programming, which will continue. Most importantly, we will continue the DC Thursday Night Dinner tradition. A cohort of AOK adult family members will host Thursday Night Dinners in DC on a rotating basis. The Art Space we have created downtown DC will continue to offer space and resources to DC-area young artists. Our mentoring program will continue to grow, facilitating trusting relationships for our young artists with adults who are committed to their success. We will continue to support our young artists in the educational endeavors (we still have 12 in college!) and help them meet their everyday needs. And we will continue to offer special experiences including birthday and holiday celebrations our annual Cape Cod vacation.

- **AOK Fellows Program.** In 2019 we will kick off the new AOK Fellows program, which will allow us to define the number of kids we focus on, so that we can ensure fidelity to our proven, high-touch model of support, while still allowing a range of activities designed to include lots of kids. Here's how the program will work:
 - Fellowships will start on January 1 and will last for one year.
 - Current fellows can reapply twice for a maximum total fellowship period of three years.
 - AOK Fellows will sign agreements which clearly describe what's expected from them, and what they can expect from AOK.
 - Fellows will be the kids we go deep with—kids who attend TND, kids we match with mentors, help with tuition, artist supplies, life support, getting jobs, internships, etc. Kids we provide Christmas gifts to, celebrate birthdays—everything we do with our current close circle of kids.
 - AOK Fellows would get first dibs going to the Cape, on residencies at the IS Arts Space and at residencies in Wellfleet.
 - A pipeline of new and potential Fellows will be created and maintained using the Arts Space at IS. Events, shows, exhibits, workshops, classes, etc.—all the activities at IS that attract young artists would be used to cultivate new Fellows.
 - When Fellows finishes their fellowships, they graduate to mentor status, and are invited to take on younger Fellows to help them grow and progress as young creative people and as young adults. Fellowship graduates would no longer receive the comprehensive support that Fellows do, but would still have access to resources and be a part of the AOK community.

The AOK Fellows Program will allow us to provide the deep-dive support we are known for to defined cohorts of kids, while still providing a range of activities that are available to a wider range of kids. In other words, it will allow us to thread the needle between

going big and going deep in a way that's intentional and that will allow us to be confident we are delivering the support our kids need. It will also create greater clarity and transparency about which kids have access to which resources.

- **AOK Mentor/Coaching Program.** As the number of kids coming to AOK continues to increase, our Mentor/Coaching program becomes even more important, as David, Kathy and Carolyn simply cannot provide the high-touch, in-person mentorship our young people need to so many kids.

As a result, we are intensifying our efforts to strengthen and grow our Mentor/Coaching program. Our objective in 2019 is to have every AOK Fellow matched with a one-on one mentor/coach. This will ensure that all our kids benefit from the high-touch personal relationship approach that has been so effective at AOK, and that we have all the information we need to make sure all our Fellows have what they need to pursue their dreams.

- **Student debt.** In 2019 we aim to raise money specifically to pay off these loans and ensure we can pay tuition for our kids without taking on any more debt.

We can only accomplish these ambitious objectives with your continued support; we count on you to be the wind beneath the wings of our incredible young artists. Thank you for your generosity; it has a direct impact on the lives of our young people, their sense of themselves and their ability to live up to their potential. We look forward to working with you to continue this crucial work in 2019 and beyond.

“Being a part of the AOK family has given me more opportunity as a working artist than ever before. AOK’s networks have helped me accomplish goals I didn’t even know I had yet, and I’m thankful for everything AOK has done”

—Craig Clinkscales, AOK artist

For more information about AOK, or to make a donation, please visit aokdc.org. You can also email us at info@aokdc.org or call us at 412.508.0411.